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ABSTRACT

For 37 states in the United States, Project Wild has become an officially sanctioned, distributed and funded "environmental and conservation education program." For those who are striving to implement focused, sequential, learning programs, as well as those who wish to promote harmony through a non-anthropocentric world view, Project Wild may serve as the biggest single impediment to their work that the field has yet produced. Opposition to Project Wild has come from several camps. Two states, Missouri and Maine, object to its not being more pointedly pro-hunting. From the opposite side of the anthropocentric/biocentric debate, eight organizations have criticized Project Wild: the American Humane Association; the Fund for Animals, the Animals Protection Institute, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Humane Society of the United States, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Some aspects of Project Wild that have caused concern are: it is not a focused, sequential program; it does not concentrate enough on developing understandings of broad ecological concepts; it employs poor teaching and learning techniques; it contains a pervasive and systemic anthropocentric bias; and it puts too little emphasis on the urgency of the crisis that the United States faces and the need to adapt less consumptive lifestyles. (AA)

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Project Wild

(Project Tame)

a critical analysis by David Siegenthaler
The Institute for Earth Education

*This critical analysis and the accompanying debate first appeared
as a series in several 1986 and 1987 issues of "Talking Leaves,"
The Institute for Earth Education's seasonal member's journal.*

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For 37 states in the U.S., Project Wild has become an officially sanctioned, distributed and funded "environmental and conservation education program." Tragically, within the next two years, it may be adopted by all but a few states. The "program" is really nothing very new, and in fact, it is not actually a program at all. For those who are striving to implement focused, sequential, learning programs, as well as those who wish to promote harmony through a non-anthropocentric world view, Project Wild may serve as the biggest single impediment to their work that the field has yet produced.

Project Wild was produced jointly by the Western Regional Environmental Education Council (WREEC) and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. WREEC got its start from a federal Office of Education Grant in 1970. You will recognize the title of another major project they produced in cooperation with the American Forest Institute: "Project Learning Tree." The contents of the two projects were developed similarly: an outline of concepts to be covered was



developed drawing upon the ideas from people of diverse backgrounds (educators, preservationists, conservationists, wildlife managers, businessmen, industry representatives and others), then the materials to teach those concepts were written by teachers in five separate writing workshops. Finally, the activities were tested and edited prior to release. Fish and Wildlife agencies and environmental education councils take primary responsibility for the distribution of Project Wild. As with Project Learning Tree, the materials are only distributed through instructional workshops conducted by an approved leader.

As stated in the Preface to Project Wild, its purpose is "... to motivate youngsters to take intelligent and constructive action to conserve wildlife and natural resources." It does this in what it claims to be an objective and unbiased manner, its mission being "... to help youngsters learn how to think, not what to think," by providing information and helping students evaluate choices and thereby make reasonable decisions."

The following is a sample of the format followed by each activity (using as an example the activity "Habitat Lap Sit"):

Standard Format

Each activity includes a statement of the instructional objective,

a brief description of the instructional method employed,

background information for the instructor,

Habitat Lap Sit

("Students will be able to: 1-identify the components of habitat, 2-recognize how humans and other animals depend upon habitat, and 3-interpret the significance of loss or change in habitat in terms of people and wildlife.")

("Students physically form an interconnected circle to demonstrate the components of a habitat.")

(The narrative for this activity states that every animal needs a place to live and that that environment is called its habitat. "Habitat includes food, water, shelter, and adequate space in an arrangement appropriate to the animal's need." It goes on to mention the effects if components are missing, plus additional limiting factors, and mentions the importance of interrelationships of all living things -- including interdependencies.)

a list of materials
needed,

(none for "Habitat Lap Sit")

step by step proce-
dures,

(Students count off from one to four: ones are food, twos are water, threes are shelter, and fours are space. A circle is formed by building repeated chains of food, water, shelter and space. With each person facing and holding the waist of the person in front of them, they all sit down on the lap of the person behind them. At this point they are reminded that food, water, shelter and space in the proper arrangement, represented by the completed circle, are what is needed for a good habitat. Then, the instructor illustrates what the effect of a drought might be by having all the students representing water remove themselves from the circle. It collapses, and the exercise is repeated using other examples. The students are then asked to summarize what they have learned.)

a few examples of the
ways in which to
evaluate student
learning,

("1-What are the five essential components of habitat? 2-Explain how the arrangement of food, water, shelter and space is important to humans and other animals. 3-What would probably have the greater long-term impact of the wildlife living on a farm in Iowa -- a severe winter which killed many animals or the development of part of the farm into a commercial shopping center?")

indication of recom-
mended grade level,

("Grades 4-9 -- also younger and older")

subjects from which
concepts are drawn,

("Science, Physical Education")

skills,

("discussion, generalization, kinesthetic concept development, small group work")

duration,

("20 minutes")

recommended group size, (15 to 45 students)

setting - indoors or outdoors, ("Outdoors preferred; indoors possible")

key vocabulary, ("habitat, food, water, shelter, space, arrangement")

and, finally, the conceptual framework reference. ("I.A, I.A.2, I.A.4., I.C., I.C.1., I.C.2., I.C.3., I.C.4., I.D., III.B.")

The conceptual framework appears as an appendix to the project's 81 activities. It is divided into seven categories: I) Awareness and Appreciation of Wildlife, II) Human Values and Wildlife, III) Wildlife and Ecological Systems, IV) Wildlife Conservation, V) Cultural and Social Interaction with Wildlife, VI) Wildlife Issues and Trends: Alternatives and Consequences, and VII) Wildlife, Ecological Systems, and Responsible Human Actions. The categories are then broken down into 30 topic headings and then further divided into 145 points or concepts. For the 20 minute activity, "Habitat Lap Sit," cited above, the conceptual framework references are thus:

- I.A. "Humans and wildlife have similar basic needs;"
- I.A.2. "All living things are affected by and interact with their environment;"
- I.A.4. "Wildlife has habitat needs that are much like those of humans, although these needs are satisfied in different ways;"
- I.C. "Humans and wildlife are subject to many of the same environmental conditions;"
- I.C.1. "Both humans and wildlife depend on their habitats;"
- I.C.2. "Habitat is composed of many integrated components including food, water, shelter or cover, space, and the arrangement of these in relation to each other;"
- I.C.3. "The health and well-being of both humans and wildlife are dependent upon the quality of the natural environment;"

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- I.C.4 "Environmental change in its various forms affects all life;"
- I.D. "Humans have far greater ability to alter or adjust to environments than does wildlife, thus, humans have a responsibility to consider effects of their activities on other life forms;"
- III.B. "All living elements of an ecological system are interdependent."

In short, this adaptation of a common, noncompetitive recreational activity now theoretically teaches ten different ecological understandings. Ah, how much can be achieved by adding the evidently miraculous ingredient of "discussion" to any learning experience. Of course, keep in mind that they state their activities are designed to teach the cited concepts either directly or indirectly!

My impression of Project Wild suggests that its appeal may be due to a variety of reasons. Many teachers will attend in-service training as an introduction to Project Wild, and receive all of the materials free as a result. Thus, the activity guides are theirs for no expense beyond that small amount which may go

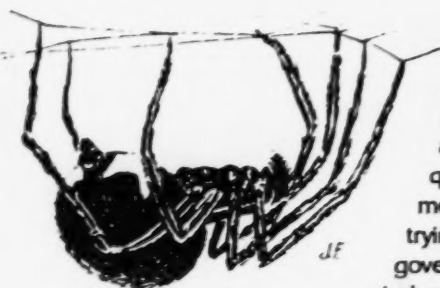
towards any required in-service training credit. What they have been provided with in this manner are activities which purport to accomplish objectives that speak directly to remedying our environmental woes. Since their curriculum may mandate that they have

". . . this adaptation of a common, noncompetitive recreational activity now theoretically teaches ten different ecological understandings."

such a component -- and besides, everyone knows that we've got to do something -- having a few Project Wild activities to sprinkle around may seem like the perfect solution. Of course, doing something, in this case, will be entirely without sacrifice or pain, as the activities require little or no preparation, few props and materials beyond those normally occurring in a classroom, no commitment to doing an entire educational program, no travel, no expense, no expertise, no "untraditional methods," and for the majority of them you needn't even go outside. For the teacher, the format is very nonthreatening.

The project has yet another appeal: any organization or agency may become an associate or contributing sponsor at any time, and subsequent editions will credit their participation. Therefore, any group faced

with the necessity of producing programs for their own areas, may jump on the Project Wild bandwagon and supposedly accomplish their needs.



For environmental education councils, departments of conservation and education, and similar agencies, to latch onto the nationwide momentum of this material is much easier than asking and answering the tougher questions about what environmental education should really be trying to accomplish and why various government agencies and private industries are suddenly so interested in funding it.

Some state environmental education associations appear to have become virtual hostages to the Project Wild funding, losing all semblance of impartiality in their mission as a result. Their leadership often seems to be practically interchangeable with that of Project Wild in their states, and you will see practically no serious analysis of the project's materials in their newsletters and conferences.

Project Wild materials also convey a traditional and comfortable pedagogic style by virtue of their layout alone. The manuals open with credits to sponsors, members and contributors, a call to action by John Denver, an introduction to the materials, instructions on how to use the activities, and a detailed table of contents. The activities follow, spiced with good quality graphics and outlined to make quick reference easy. The books close with a glossary, a listing of activities by grade, a listing of activities by subject, a cross-reference by skills, a topic index, a listing of which activities need to be done outdoors or in a large area, an alphabetical listing, the conceptual framework, a metric conversion chart and the acknowledgements. It is explained that the project has undergone thorough evaluation by means of expert reviews, pilot and field testing, and that it will be continually evaluated and updated. It is designed in both format and language to appeal to those who believe themselves to be true, professional educators.

Project Wild states that it intends to be an unbiased and objective educational program, though I do not believe that is the case. It has obtained the endorsement and sponsorship of organizations of diverse purposes and philosophies, such as the National Wildlife Federation and

the Defenders of Wildlife. At least, by incorporating the disparate points of view of such groups, the material could potentially serve to bring important issues to the attention of secondary students (although a better topic of debate might be the inherent dangers of the material itself), but I assume its primary use is at the elementary level.

Although the idea of developing understandings of broad ecological concepts is not new to the field of environmental education (as those familiar with Acclimatization/Earth Education programs can attest), Project Wild is one of the few that gives concept learning systematic attention (at least in the Conceptual Framework). I believe this recognition of the importance of concepts in learning represents a great step forward, even though the means to those ends in Project Wild are still in much need of improvement.

Two additional attributes of Project Wild deserve mention here: the attempt to incorporate experiential learning modes, and the structured piloting, evaluation and revision undertaken. Suffice it to say for the moment that these are positive attempts, and though falling short of their goals, are to be lauded for their inclusion in the development of the project. Project Wild staff invite discussion and recommendations for revision of the material. I'm sure they are sincere in their desire to receive suggestions.

* * * * *

I believe Project Wild's major shortcomings fall under two main headings: its lack of a sound learning model and its anthropocentric bias. Each of the activities could itself be the subject of a lengthy evaluation, but because of space limitations I will limit my examples. It is my hope that my comments here will stimulate more in-depth consideration of these issues.

The Learning Framework

Project Wild provides no model of the learning processes it employs, nor does it explain the instructional theory upon which it is based. To a large extent, it relies upon discussion, both for the purpose of presenting essential background information prior to the activities and for conveying the point the activities themselves were to teach. In this respect, its approach is not unlike much of what occurs in the field of education in

general. In many cases, responses are elicited from students who very likely will not have had the experience that would prepare them to answer correctly. Students are then encouraged to guess at a response the instructor feels is accurate. This method of drawing information out of the students invites several dangerous consequences: students initiate their own line of reasoning which may prove faulty; much processing of incorrect information may impede the learner's ability to arrive at closure on the point of the lesson; the student's retained knowledge may not coincide with the activities' objectives; and students who are reluctant to risk an incorrect response may withdraw from intellectual participation entirely. Frankly, for a project that prides itself on being "experiential" it's surprising to see the authors continually resort to using a common classroom technique that represents at best a very low level of "doing" for most of the learners. Of course, from the teacher's perspective, the inclusion of a discussion component eliminates the need for the activity itself to teach the points of the lesson, since anything that is lacking there can be made up for by explaining it later. Besides the obvious failure of the experiential component in such a case, a further danger lies in the possibility that the teacher's lack of experience or knowledge in the subject area (although the materials contain background information for the teacher, it is sketchy at best), will produce more misconceptions than genuine understanding. For example, one lesson in which the activity is particularly weak in conveying the main points, and which depends heavily on discussion to prop it up, is the example given earlier, "Habitat Lap Sit." The lap sit circle demonstrates a form of sociological interdependence, but fails as an analogy for the ecological concept of habitat. The dependence it demonstrates certainly does not accurately portray the complex interrelationships involved in ecological systems. It doesn't allow for fluctuations in the supply of food, water and shelter but simplifies it to an all or nothing analogy -- any change triggering a complete failure of the system. The activity conveys no sense of habitat (it's not



necessarily even done outdoors), and the background information stresses the importance of food, water, shelter, and space in a suitable arrangement, yet the activity conveys only a linear arrangement for which it is obviously of no importance in what order those elements occur. Finally, the objectives for "Habitat Lap Sit" can only be met if the discussion afterwards conveys the

points in such a way that the students will be capable of applying the understandings following the twenty minute time frame. Likewise for each of the ten items referred to in the conceptual framework! In fact, the circle itself may serve as an obstacle in understanding at least one conceptual framework reference: "Environmental change in its various forms affects all life," since any alteration in the circle produces systemic failure, while ecological systems cope with constant change. For the most part, Project Wild activities follow the Discussion-Activity-Discussion format, and will appeal to teachers who like to do a good deal of discussing, expounding and correcting with a few verbal students, keeping the real substance of their objectives in the cerebral realm, as opposed to making the concepts more concrete for all their learners.

The conceptual framework may itself be a bit misleading. In addition to the objectives stated for each activity, there are references to items in the conceptual framework which that activity is designed to teach either directly or indirectly. Though I applauded the Project's acknowledgement of concepts earlier, I must now warn you that if your objective is to develop understandings of broad ecological concepts, such as energy flow and cycling,

you'd do better to design your own vehicles to accomplish them, than to take Project Wild's word for it that they can be accomplished there. For each of the

"One activity cites 80 concepts that are taught either directly or indirectly in the 45 minutes given to it!"

81 activities included in the elementary guide, there is an average of nine items referred to in the conceptual framework. A few of the activities make only one framework reference, and one activity ("The Hunter") cites 80 concepts that are taught either directly or indirectly in the 45 minutes given to it. Having had some exposure to such curriculum development myself, I can guess at how they arrived at this feat. It's not that they decided ahead of time what concepts they wanted an activity to teach, then designed the activity (as they lead you to believe in the introduction to the conceptual framework). Rather, the activity was probably written up, then they went through it and tried to list all the things they thought it could conceivably cover. My suspicion of this approach has been reinforced by the increase in conceptual framework references for "The Hunter" -- from 37 in the 1983 edition to 80 in the 1985 revisions -- though the activity remained essentially the same.

Designing activities that will themselves teach the concepts is at best a most difficult task facing educators. It takes a lot of time, great attention to detail, a very good grasp of the learning process, and must be carefully focused in order to accomplish its goals. Project Wild simply does not focus on attaining an understanding of the concepts it lists in its conceptual framework.

In its introduction, Project Wild states that the activities have been arranged in an order that fosters conceptual development. Yet in the same paragraph, instructors are invited to pick and choose activities as they like: "Each activity is designed to stand alone, without other Project Wild activities. There is no need to do the activities in order, nor to do all activities, even for a given grade level." Therefore, if used according to their design objective, Project Wild activities may become a part of a focused program, but are themselves merely a collection of activities which the authors claim are each independently viable. Since the leaders are told right from the start to do anything they want with these activities, Project Wild's most serious flaw may be this lack of a programmatic approach to learning. An educational program, as opposed to a handful of environmental activities sprinkled around over a melange of other educational pursuits, is a carefully crafted sequence of cumulative learning experiences designed with specific outcomes in mind. The Project Wild materials never even suggest to the teachers that what they need to do is to build specific, focused learning programs -- programs that will help their participants understand how life functions ecologically, what that means for them in their own lives, and how they can begin making some changes in their lifestyles in order to live more in harmony with the earth and all its creatures. Although Project Wild calls itself an environmental education program, it is really just a collection of supplemental activities many of which do not even require taking the youngsters outdoors and most of which never even suggest that the reason the other animals of the earth are in trouble is because of our consumptive lifestyles.

The Feelings Base

I would hope that anyone involved in education about the earth and its systems of life, with a goal of enabling others to live more in harmony with it, would consider the enormously important subject of generally how people feel about it. We have to love the earth and feel a part of it. That's not achieved simply by knowing scientific "facts" about it. Al-

though knowledge and familiarity may enhance our appreciation of life, feelings are quite distinct from and transcendent of those "facts." We experience a wide range of feelings, from love, admiration and happiness to fear, anger and

frustration. These feelings are strong sources of motivation for action, change, protection and appreciation. No better defense can be had than that provided by someone who recognizes a threat to something that is deeply loved. How are these feelings for the earth developed? Surely, not merely by talking about it. We must have firsthand contact with the natural world, so that learning can take place within the context of its subject and so that vital personal feelings for it can be developed. Much of that contact needs to involve receptive skills unencumbered by intellectual baggage.

"Out of the motivation that our feelings produce, combined with our understanding of the world, lies the real hope for the future."

Yet in the Project Wild materials one note (in the activity "Classroom Carrying Capacity") warns the leader not to frighten or depress the students when discussing carrying capacity. Although I am not advocating intentionally frightening or depressing students, many important issues can evoke some feeling of depression in students (particularly when they recognize how they may be affected), and those feelings are legitimate and useful in confronting those issues. Out of the motivation that our feelings produce, combined with our understanding of the world, lies the real hope for the future. We must acknowledge both the problems and the hope. Knowledge alone produces nothing -- and, in fact, does not exist. Project Wild offers students the opportunity to discuss their feelings in some of the activities, yet it does little to develop feelings which reflect a sense of relationship with the earth.

The Anthropocentric Bias

The human-centered, manipulation-based approach that Project Wild takes is its essence, and, as such, could not be divorced from it without completely reworking the materials. The language is pervasively that of human use including such terms as "harvest," "resources," "game" "nongame," "management" and "conservation." Though they claim to

be unbiased, the materials strongly favor a legitimization of management practices which are designed to identify and produce large "game" population levels and rationalize artificial population control through hunting. Whether or not this bias is intentional, it is still present. Fish and wildlife agencies have historically been charged with insuring a sustained yield of wildlife. Perhaps much of Project Wild's bias can be explained by the influence of one of its principle sponsors: the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Opposition to Project Wild has come from several camps. Oddly enough, Dr. Cheryl Charles, the Project's Director, claims that two states, Missouri and Maine, have opted so far not to adopt the materials because strong factions in both places object to its not being more pointedly pro-hunting. Fortunately, more formalized and heated opposition has come from a group on the opposite side of the anthropocentric/biocentric debate. Eight organizations: the American Humane Association, the Fund for Animals, the Animal Protection Institute, the A.S.P.C.A., the Humane Society of the United States, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and People for Ethical Treatment of Animals have produced a consensus critique of Project Wild. The report, entitled "The Dangers of Project Wild," goes into some detail on the contents of Project Wild which they find to be biased, inaccurate and incomplete. I recommend the report, both for its specific responses to the content of Project Wild and for its value in addressing widespread issues within the fields of ecology and ecological systems preservation (available for \$6.50 U.S. from The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037 USA). The report recommends that Project Wild be discontinued and withdrawn until corrections are made. Al-



though the Project Wild materials have been altered somewhat in what is presumed to be a response to these objections, most of the problems remain. The elementary level activity, "The Hunter," is a case in point. The background material remains overwhelmingly in support of hunting. The "factual" material stresses hunting's acceptance as a tool of management, the "dangers" of large deer populations (which tend to destroy their own habitat), the application of hunters' fees to wildlife management, and the altruistic motives of the hunters. A few

sentences are given to alternative viewpoints -- amounting to only a mention for opposition to hunting on the basis of ethics and population controls inherent in ecological systems. This weighted presentation distorts the truth by omitting supportive arguments against hunting including those made by ecologists working in the field of preservation.

Although mention is made of ecological interrelationships in Project Wild, no emphasis is placed upon the value of preservation and restoration of ecological systems as a whole.

"... does not stress the value of harmonizing our lifestyles as opposed to manipulating our surroundings to fit our greed."

The tone of the materials conveys the sense that wildlife, habitat and people, although related, are somehow independent. They do not convey the message that we are not in control of natural processes on earth but are fully dependent upon them. They do not stress the value of harmonizing our lifestyles as opposed to manipulating our surroundings to fit our greed. And perhaps that pervasive human-centered tone of Project Wild is an indication of why they have had difficulty in dealing with the issue of intrinsic value. In the first edition, intrinsic value appears in the conceptual framework at the back of the book as the statement: "Wildlife has intrinsic value, although humans often only recognize values based upon wants and needs," but not a single activity in that edition makes reference to that statement. Subsequent editions have been revised by inserting that item in the conceptual framework reference at the end of some activities, and by inserting a sentence in those activities stating that some people regard wildlife as having intrinsic value. However, no discussion of what that means, no supporting arguments and no definition of the word "intrinsic" appear in Project Wild.

To their credit, Project Wild has responded to some of the objections raised by the Humane Society, et al. by including references to a wider variety of organizations than they had previously. For example, now included in "The Hunters" activity at the secondary level (not the elementary activity mentioned above) are statements written by Defenders of Wildlife, the Fund for Animals, the Humane Society, the National Audubon Society, the National Rifle Association and the National Wildlife Federation. Those changes, however, have done little to eliminate the inherent bias in the activity itself.

The Bottom Line

Project Wild's weaknesses as a learning tool are as pervasive as its anthropocentric bias, yet it may become the most widely distributed set of materials on the environmental education scene. It perpetuates the myth that the mission of teaching people about how life works on the earth and what that means for them in their own lives can be accomplished without a concentrated effort or a focused program, and it makes learning about basic ecological concepts subject to the ability of each teacher and the vagaries of chance and circumstance. It will be interesting to see how Project Wild is treated by the teaching community over the next few years. For the time being, however, it has a hold on the energies and attention of a lot of people who might otherwise be more usefully occupied and who might otherwise be more receptive to participating in exciting, focused, sequential programs based upon sound learning principles. It is my hope that the consternation it has evoked, and the issues that have been raised in response to it, will induce everyone to seek alternatives.

14

The Debate

My critical analysis of Project Wild has, not surprisingly, elicited some responses, the most detailed of which have come from people intimately engaged in its



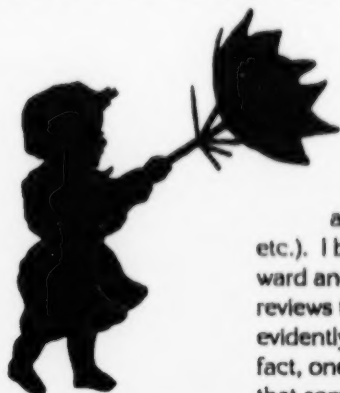
development and promotion. My purpose in writing the article was primarily to provoke thought. My experience in the field of environmental education convinced me that the materials were being promoted and used without much, if any, pre-evaluation and minimal scrutiny at best. My hunch is that even some Associates of The Institute for Earth Education have used the materials without much analysis. So, in my opinionated way, I hope I have raised some questions. In this, I find myself in agreement with an idea presented in the introduction to Project Wild itself; that is that my mission is to help you learn how to think, not what to think, so that you can take intelligent and constructive actions regarding earth education. Unlike Project Wild, I have made no attempt to suppress my biases (I believe, after all, that they are well founded!). I am willing to admit at the outset that I am not the most skilled or rigorous thinker and that I am certainly not the most qualified to present a critique. But I won't let that stop me from executing my rights and duties of citizenship on this earth or in this field. I believe that the issues are important, so however imperfect my remarks may be, I use them to stimulate a critical assessment of the materials. I believe that no matter what we are engaged in, as a group or individually, we must, from time to time, assess what we are doing, how effective we are, and whether it's getting us where we want to go. If the points I raise are invalid or involve faulty reasoning, please let me know. I am, of course, open to criticism myself.

What follows are some responses to my article and my comments about them. It is not possible, nor is it our purpose, to reprint in this journal all of the responses in their entirety. Therefore, I have restated and combined comments when necessary.

I found the Project Wild/Project Tame article to be filled with biased language and cheap shots. I do not feel the tone of the article was either a good editorial or a productive, useful review. I would expect a program with the sophistication of The Institute for Earth Education to do a better job of sorting

out an objective review from the interwoven language of editorial bias by the writer and to present the opinion of the writer clearly as opinion.

The respondent was clearly upset by my biased and opinionated language. I dare say, we probably wouldn't have had any response from this person had I written an "objective" review (please note the preceding statement was one of speculative opinion on my part), and the aftermath wouldn't have been anywhere near as exciting as it is now (a personal value statement). First, let me speak to this idea of an "objective review." Since anyone attempting an evaluation of materials can only do so through the conceptual processes of his or her own brain -- or, in other words, since the interpretation of perceptual information must be filtered through the ideas that guide one's own thought processes -- the result will be, in effect, and by definition, subjective and biased. Mine was



meant to be a critical review which went beyond a simple description of the physical materials (which would be about as close to an objective review as you could come, although even then, I would think there might still be some disagreements about colors, print, clarity, etc.). I believe that my biases were straightforward and not concealed (as they usually are in reviews that claim to be objective). I have evidently stimulated some debate. That was, in fact, one of my primary objectives. I will allow that some of my opinions may have been

strongly stated, but that is all the better for stimulating response. I don't want to make it seem like we agree on an issue. If, in fact, we don't agree, or don't even have a common understanding of what the issues are. These kinds of debates can be helpful in defining issues, asking questions and then (when we both understand the questions) proposing answers. That, I believe, is the way towards finding truth. I will also allow that there is usually truth to be found in both sides of an argument, but that does not mean I must overlook the things I believe to be problems. So I make no claim to having produced an objective review, however well-founded I believe my objections to be.

In the environmental action seminar I've taught for the past 16 years, I've used a set of "guiding commandments," the first of which is, only positive positions allowed. You can't be against

something without being for something. We must eliminate views which focus on divisiveness. We must all come out of our seclusion and participate in the mainstream environmental education effort with a language that focuses on I, we, and us, rather than you and/or me.

Can a position or idea that is in opposition to another be adequately promoted by simply being positive? I think not. If I am for something that is in opposition to another, I am doing no one a service by ignoring those points of opposition or by not identifying the things I see as problems. If I don't like your idea, find your reasoning faulty or don't understand you, it is dishonest for me to support that idea or reasoning even if I have not formulated an alternative. To support a bad idea for lack of an alternative proposition makes no sense. In fact, identifying and working with objections are ways to arrive at an alternative even if one is not proffered from the start. My pulse rate increases as much as anyone's when I am criticized, yet I sincerely believe that criticism can be valuable. Do you really advocate sticking to only positive positions in the face of nuclear power and weapons, toxic wastes, superpower imperialism, apartheid, slavery, overpopulation and failing ecosystems? I can't imagine it even in the evaluation of our own programs, much less in an evaluation of Project Wild. I believe we can affirm that with which we are in agreement and further help each other by engaging our intellect in the resolution of our differences.

The major impetus behind the development of the institute's programs has been our experience with the failures of other approaches. Had we not identified problems in other methods, we probably wouldn't have to put so much of our energy into developing alternatives. We aren't in it simply for the sake of diversity; we're in it because we feel we must accomplish some very important results, and we're still exploring how best to do that. Our critique of other approaches is part of that effort.

When differences of opinion are suppressed out of fear of divisiveness, more hostility is created, and the cause of attaining a unified effort is often defeated. Communication needs to be open and honest and engaging.

"The major impetus behind the development of the institute's programs has been our experience with the failures of other approaches."

I do not feel the writer did his homework very thoroughly as the instructional context and delivery strategies for Project Wild are developed during intensive inservice workshops and follow-up programs.

I will not say that there are no intensive inservice workshops or follow-up programs, only that in my experience (bolstered by the experience of a number of our other staff members), the workshops have been little more than a sampling of activities, and follow-up programs have been more of the same or non-existent. My own impression and that of many other participants was that the workshop lacked substance, particularly in the area of instructional context and delivery strategies. This is, perhaps, because Project Wild leaves so much up to the teachers. As a result of my dealings with both Project Learning Tree and Project Wild as a member of environmental education councils in Kentucky and Minnesota (which had responsibilities for implementing these projects) I can say with confidence that we did not conduct what I would call in a functional sense, an "intensive inservice workshop." In fairness, I should point out that the workshops did last nearly as long as a regular school day and did include lunch.

I personally believe that education about the environment is a critical and pervasive need in this society -- growing more, not less critical with each passing day. Our work is to provide learners of any age with awareness, knowledge, skills, experiences, and commitment to result in informed decisions, responsible behaviors and constructive actions -- particularly when they have the potential to affect the life-sustaining qualities of this planet... Looking at public schooling in this country, it is obvious that little is taught in a systematic and comprehensive way about the living earth. In the face of: 1) how little earth-based education is being taught out there; 2) how important it is that concepts be taught related to the environment and humans' responsible interaction with the environment; and 3) the need for a futures orientation, I have made some choices. I believe that an infused approach that depends greatly on individual teacher choices and professionalism is one valid route to take. This is a long-term process we are trying to effect; not a short-term panacea. It requires, I believe, incremental, slow and steady efforts over many years. It requires flexible attention to the changing characteristics of schooling. Most often the materials and strategies we offer

are integrated into a teacher's own curriculum as a result of his or her own professional decision-making as to where attention to given concepts, skills, and experience is most powerful and effective.

We agree that there is a clear and present need and that there is some urgency in our mission, but we probably disagree on the level of responsive actions necessary given the circumstances of our planet. Infused approaches lack focus. Rather than a distilling and refining of objectives, they tend to throw more of them into the stew. Given the limited time our students are in school, the nature of learning, and the urgency of reform, does it make sense to approach such crucial education in a diffused manner? I fear also that, given your concern about maintaining objectivity, you cannot adequately make the arguments for any one position. Although considering all sides of an issue is important, it is also important to go a step further into action. You cannot model critical thinking and taking intelligent, responsible action for your learners if you don't take the arguments far enough, for fear of revealing a bias or losing objectivity, to come to any kind of visible decision yourselves on the issues. The tragedy in this may be twofold: one, that you could possibly conceive that any person or program can have no bias, thus being blinded to yours; and two, that you provide no role models for the real advocacy that is necessary to address the critical problems of overconsumption, greed and pollution. How do you inspire students to take action if you keep arguing in favor of an objective position? I'm afraid they will just see and learn more inaction and double-talk.

Rather than placing primary focus on learning outcomes, you appear to concentrate your attention on structuring the materials for ease-of-use. You agree that little earth-based education is being taught, but your solution is to provide materials that depend greatly on the energy and initiative of the teachers. I

agree that there are no short term panaceas and that it requires steady efforts over many years, but I don't believe that we are helping the situation by slipping in a few more objectives on the side of courses that were designed to do



something else. We can't give professional teachers something that produces only token results and still convince them of its value in the long run. If teachers are in on it for the purpose of achieving your objectives, their instructional strategies should be focused and direct.

Each activity has been tested to determine that it effectively accomplishes its stated objectives at the grade levels indicated. The references to the Project Wild conceptual framework are often for teachers' additional background information, not to suggest that each activity in fact accomplishes all the points under what is called the "conceptual framework reference."

Project Wild has been tested, and those tests seem to indicate that there is a statistically significant shift in before and after test performance in Project Wild activities. However, some notable comments included in your evaluation report were that classes of science teachers scored better than those of other disciplines, it was primarily science teachers who utilized the materials, junior and senior high students made minimal cognitive gains and showed no change in attitudes, and teacher participation in the "intensive inservice workshops" seemed to have no bearing on whether or not significant gains were made by use of Project Wild materials. I am hesitant to say too much on this subject because I have not seen nor analyzed the actual testing instrument to know exactly how and for what the students were tested.



Nonetheless, a very important question remains: even if the testing shows that the activities individually accomplish what they claim, what have we really accomplished in the long run -- i.e., when the students have forgotten the post-activity discussions which elicited the learning? What have we done to develop the feelings and sense of relationship with the natural world that are neces-



sary for us to champion it? Have we built solid, big picture understandings of how life operates on this planet and what this means in our own lives? Many of the Project Wild objectives state that students will be able to analyze or make judgement, such as, "students will be able to make personal judgments about the appropriateness of hunting." But will they?

In my article I stated that the activities were designed to teach either directly or indirectly the items listed under the conceptual framework reference. The materials state that the activities teach the concepts directly, or that they have an indirect relationship to the concepts while the listing is primarily for the teacher's reference. In either case I take that to mean that there is a relationship there; that the activity may be used to reinforce another concept, or it may provide supportive information for that concept, or that the concept is useful in accomplishing the objectives of the activity. If it is not useful in one of these ways, what then is the function of the conceptual framework reference? If it is primarily for reference to supplementary information, we are misled into thinking that the activities have been designed to accomplish more than they do, and that the conceptual framework is more directly related to the activities than it actually is. Or is the conceptual framework reference just a pedagogical disguise to hide the fact that the actual objectives of most of the activities don't deal directly with the really important ecological understandings and actions?

You say you leave much up to the professionalism of individual teachers. I'm glad you point that out in your letters to us; I wish your activity guides stressed it more for their users.

We have consciously attended to diverse teaching and learning styles in the final editing of these materials. It is true that many of the activities are open-ended -- another statement of our respect for the decision-making capacities of the students as well as their teachers. If we decide everything for a student, or his or her teacher, we negate some of that student's capacities for independent and thoughtful decision-making.

What I think you are saying is that you will not tell teachers how to best accomplish your objectives. Why not? Won't they expect you to know? Frankly, this seems like little more than an old rationalization for a leader's lack of preparation. I'm afraid it also means there has been a further reduction in the structure and delivery instructions for your activities because you can leave it up to the teachers to work out the

glitches. We would prefer to give the teachers more help in implementing such important learning experiences.

I hope when you say that some activities are open-ended, you are referring to those situations that involve forming personal opinions and applying new understandings to the world around us and not that you are allowing the development of basic understandings to be a hit-or-miss prospect by not helping the learners reach some closure on the subject. Some of those activities, although appearing to be open-ended, may also be more manipulative in their biased presentation than even the Project Wild staff itself intended. "The Hunter," for instance, provides such overwhelming support for hunting as a proven form of wildlife management, to the neglect of opposing positions, that either the teacher or the students themselves will have to exert an extraordinary effort to be informed fully enough to make a personal judgement that, for example, hunting is, in most cases, not appropriate as an expression of our concern for the health of an ecological system nor as a responsible and respectful leisure-time pursuit. I agree that we must respect and try to enable students' capacities for independent and thoughtful decision-making. I don't believe that such skill is particularly enhanced, though, by depending upon hit-or-miss instructional tactics. As someone else has put it, if you aim at nothing, you hit it every time. We don't want to end up congratulating ourselves or others, on the basis of such sophistry.

If Mr. Siegenthaler believes that efforts to develop greater human recognition of the consequences of the actions we take each day -- actions which affect other life forms on this planet, including wildlife -- are anthropocentric, I will differ with him, respectfully. Anthropocentrism is a human world view; it suggests that all things are viewed from the perspective of what effects there will be on humans. In contrast, our purpose with Project Wild is to expand humans' understanding that "Earth is Home To Us All -- Share It Responsibly." I want people to make their choices with more information and greater commitment to understanding the impacts of the choices we make. Conscious decision-making about choices we can effect is not the same as thinking that humans are in control. We obviously are not.

Of course we must become more aware of the consequences of our actions. That is not the issue here. It was not that objective in Project Wild that I identified as being anthropocentric. It was the way in which the activities tried to meet that objective with which I was dissatisfied. I

cited the overwhelming support Project Wild gave, in both language and background material, to a traditional manipulation-based approach to wildlife management, particularly in its support of hunting. The report, cited in my article, which was produced by The Institute for the Study of Animal Problems (The Humane Society), states in part:

Incomplete and erroneous information is provided in such activities as: Oh Deer!, Carrying Capacity, Quick Frozen Critters, Classroom Carrying Capacity, How many Bears Can Live in This Forest?, Checks and Balances, Turkey Trouble and Habitat Lap Sit, to provide a distorted picture of wildlife population dynamics and to suggest that natural systems are incapable of maintaining equilibria without human intervention; that all species of wildlife overpopulate, destroy their habitat and starve without human intervention; that natural limiting factors for wildlife populations are always to be avoided; and that therefore wild animals must be manipulated and killed for their own good.

Webster's dictionary defines anthropocentric as that which "considers man as the central fact, or final aim, of the universe." In its portrayal of humans as being capable and necessary manipulators of pieces of ecological systems (with the exception of too little stress placed on manipulating our own lifestyles to more appropriate levels), Project Wild plays into that definition. Such a portrayal is dangerous because it blinds us to the complexities of the systems with which we are tinkering. There is a great deal of evidence within the current field of natural areas restoration and preservation that Project Wild could have drawn upon to provide the background material for many of



its activities. Wisdom gained from that area of scientific and moral endeavor tends to concentrate more on taking an in-depth look at natural systems, using them as models for our restoration of natural communities and seeking ways to live which won't involve the presumption that we can substitute our intelligence for that of nature.

I don't wish to be naive in my use of the term "anthropocentrism." We are naturally self-centered beings, incapable of anything but a human perspective and incapable of living without taking of the earth's resources. We are, as far as we know, unique among earth's life forms in our capacity for complex thought, but we are also unique in that we are capable of recognizing that our intelligence and knowledge are both incomplete and imperfect. Unfortunately, an anthropocentrist is also likely to be a shallow reductionist, i.e., picking things apart and exercising an apparent control over a small piece of the body of life for immediate gain. A deeper view would, in recognition of our limited understandings, adapt a gentler stance, search for the connections, and see that in spite of a unique brain we are no less dependent on the integrity of natural systems than is any other form of life. I have a modest proposal: let's figure out what an appropriate niche is for humans, and not seek to fill everyone else's.

If we truly want to achieve peace on earth and enhance the possibilities of surviving into the future, we would do well to adopt tenets such as Arne Naess described for the deep ecology movement: 1) The well-being of non-human life on earth has value in itself; 2) Richness and diversity in life forms contribute to this value and have value in themselves; 3) Humans have no right to interfere destructively with nonhuman life except to satisfy vital needs; 4) Present interference is excessive and detrimental; 5) Present policies must change. In short, if it is so obvious that we are not in control as you say, why does Project Wild advocate, through exploitive language and strong support of hunting, such an aggressively manipulative stance on wildlife management?



26

I don't think Project Wild in any way diminishes the very different approach the Institute for Earth Education has taken in its program development and implementation. I do not believe we live on an either/or planet, but rather that both these fine programs fill very important niches in the environmental education ecosystem. I celebrate diverse approaches and do not believe that there is just one right way.

This reminds me of Gandhi's claim that it is more enriching to search for a broad solution than to defend a narrow one. There is truth in that. However, I have not been defending a single approach. I have been critiquing one. And to say that there isn't only one right way is not the same as to say that every way is right. Although there are some good elements in Project Wild, there are also substantial dangers. These are what I have focused upon. I, too, celebrate different approaches and the ideas of diversity. We need to try new things, fit our programs to different audiences and settings

and do more of those things in which we feel we are most effective.

But I also feel the use of the word "diversity" can be used as a smokescreen in our field to ward off criticism

because of its identification with "right" causes. The same goes for the analogy of educational systems with ecological systems. For example, we could also say that murderers fill a unique niche in our society, but that neither provides justification for their actions nor does it accurately represent the concept of an ecological niche. Just because one approach is different than another does not legitimize its use. Each approach has to demonstrate its viability in the face of experience, results, and even criticism such as this. Criticism, I believe, can be useful if presented sincerely, even if the criticism itself is eventually exposed as being faulty. It is when we accept everything that flows our way as indiscriminately as an absorbent sponge -- without questioning -- that we are truly in trouble. I believe we need to experiment and innovate rather than to get stuck in ruts that get us nowhere. However, I also believe we need to pay more attention to what we know about how people learn. Sure, a multi-objective, non-focused, discussion-based set of materials is bound to render some results. But what are they? And are they enough? Could we be doing more? These are some of the questions I raised in the hope that you would think about

"To say that there isn't only one right way is not the same as to say that every way is right."

them. In developing earth education programs we are constantly critiquing our own efforts. In fact, that process never seems to stop for us. The constant assessing, evaluating, re-thinking and brainstorming are critical to our program development process.

Frankly, I fear Project Wild may well diminish the important efforts of others. Yes, that may sound like sour grapes, but it may also represent sour reality. The Institute for Earth Education strives to get teachers to utilize focused, sequential programs either pre-packaged and piloted by the institute or of the teacher's own design; Project Wild detracts from that by leading teachers to believe that the Project Wild supplemental materials are all they need to do the job of environmental education. The Institute for Earth Education strives to go beyond mere understanding of how ecological systems work to incorporate a real experiential component that helps participants develop a stronger sense of relationship with and belonging in the natural world. Project Wild, on the other hand, in maintaining an objective, non-biased stance, downplays feelings to the extent that most of their teaching strategies are dependent upon discussion and their materials do little to emphasize the importance of regular contact with nature. The institute stresses developing new, ecologically harmonious lifestyles that are less consumptive, more cooperative and in keeping with our current understandings of how life operates, whereas Project Wild emphasizes an approach that puts more emphasis on manipulating ecosystems rather than our personal lives and societal systems.

Yes, in many ways our programs are at odds. To use your analogy of niches in environmental education, if anything, perhaps we are vying for the same niche in that we are competing for the limited attention and energies of educators.

26

In Closing

I identified in my article some aspects of Project Wild about which I have grave concerns: It is not a focused, sequential program; it does not concentrate enough upon developing understandings of broad ecological concepts; it employs poor teaching and learning techniques (weak activities that don't actually teach the concept and thus rely heavily upon discussion to make their point); it contains a pervasive and systemic anthropocentric bias; and it puts too little emphasis on the urgency of the crises we face and the need to adopt less consumptive lifestyles. The respondents to my article have raised one point in particular that I find myself in agreement with: that the materials leave a lot up to the individual teacher. In a world in which the need for earth education is so great, and where most teachers are doing so little of it, does it make sense to produce materials that perpetuate the idea that adequate gains can be made without giving ecological concepts and crises the focused attention they deserve, particularly when the materials themselves may provide further rationalization for many of the practices that contributed to the crises?

*David Siegenthaler
Austin, Texas*

"The Dangers of Project Wild"

This consensus critique by the American Humane Association, the Fund for Animals, the Animal Protection Institute, the A.S.P.C.A., the Humane Society of the United States, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and People for Ethical Treatment of Animals is available for \$6.50 U.S. by writing:

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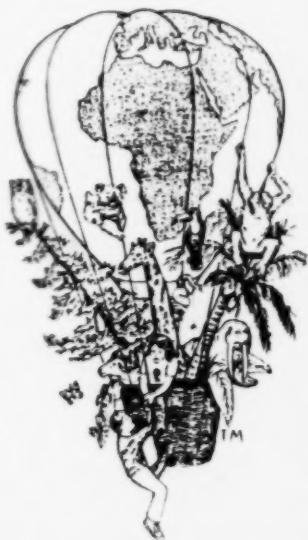
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with the natural world."*

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